

John Flansburgh here. I am writing you to tell you about a very **special** offer to Information Club members. Marjorie Galen and I are embarking on an exciting new venture. It's the...



Mr. Flansburgh

Hello Recording Club!

Each month Hello features a different artist recording songs exclusively for our subscribers. By calling 1-800-HELLO -41 and using your credit card, or by using the mail order form on the back of this letter, you will receive **TEN CD'S THIS YEAR**. These four song ep's are not for sale in any store. The price: \$41. Hello subscribers will also receive the Hello Recording Club newsletter, *Hey*.

new

Hello is an exciting way to check out top quality artists as well as a safe haven for flakey side-projects of mine and other musicians. I guarantee you there is going to be some great music coming your way as a Hello Recording Club subscriber.

The premiere release for March is electric zither stylist **Brian Dewan**. You may remember Brian opened for us at a number of our US shows this fall. Mr. Dewan has also performed in the Blue Man Group band and with David Byrne.

Future releases include Pixies front-man **Black Francis** under his new nom-de-rock

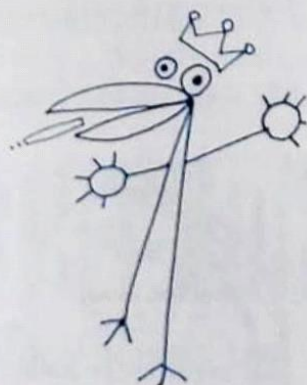
Frank Black, unseen San Franciscans **The Residents**, slow and yet from New York

Flat Old World and an electronic music project produced by myself and Brooklyn art rock fellow

Joshua Fried.

For an additional \$5 you'll receive a premium of **They Might Be Giants** **23** song-cassette. This document of TMBG's original recordings from 1985 features unreleased material and alternate versions of many songs off our first LP. It is only available through the Hello Recording Club. All proceeds from this cassette premium will be donated to the People With AIDS Coalition.

Our mascot, a bird



It's **Easy!** It's **Fun!** It's **like totally Hello!**

"It's like totally hello" is an acknowledged colloquialism of Cris Kirkwood of the Meat Puppets

THE FINE PRINT:
Join anytime in 1993
and receive all 10 cd's,
which are guaranteed to
arrive in fine condition.



NEW ITEMS!

Skull shirt & Baby Skull shirt

Our most popular item this last tour, this shirt was designed by Meat Puppets guitarist Curt Kirkwood.

#8 XL and L. \$16

Now we also have shirts in baby sizes too. The perfect gift for the sophisticated baby. #8B size 4T \$10.



The "Hey, It's That Guy" shirt

YOU DON'T KNOW HIM, BUT YOU LOVE HIM. This distinctive shirt is a favorite night shirt with female TMBG fans everywhere. #10 XXL Only \$18.

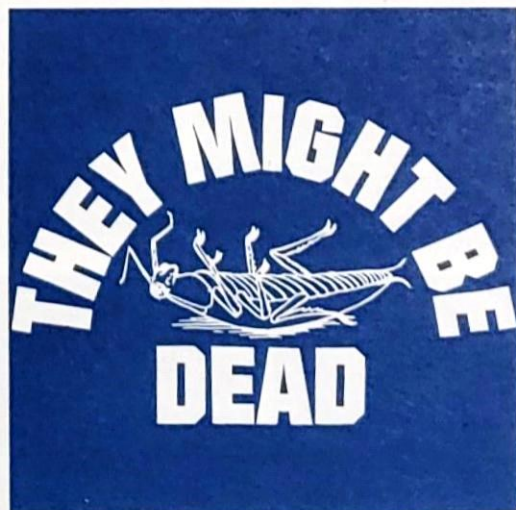
THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

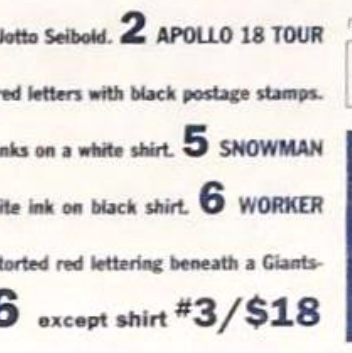
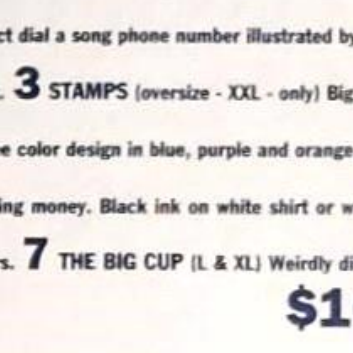
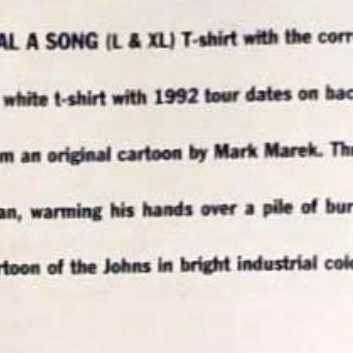
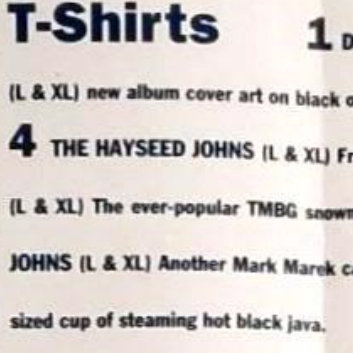
New Bumper sticker \$2 or 3 for \$5

They Might Be Dead shirt with entire '92 tour dates!

**YOU SAW ALL THE SHOWS-
NOW BUY ALL THE SHIRTS.**

With its distinctive dead roach on the front and all the 1992 tour dates from around the globe listed on the back, this shirt is guaranteed to be a real collectors item. #9 XL ONLY. Long sleeve \$18. Short sleeve \$16





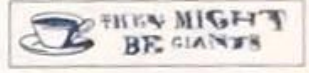
T-Shirts

- 1** DIAL A SONG (L & XL) T-shirt with the correct dial a song phone number illustrated by Jotto Seibold. **2** APOLLO 18 TOUR (L & XL) new album cover art on black or white t-shirt with 1992 tour dates on back. **3** STAMPS (oversize - XXL - only) Big red letters with black postage stamps. **4** THE HAYSEED JOHNS (L & XL) From an original cartoon by Mark Marek. Three color design in blue, purple and orange inks on a white shirt. **5** SNOWMAN (L & XL) The ever-popular TMBG snowman, warming his hands over a pile of burning money. Black ink on white shirt or white ink on black shirt. **6** WORKER JOHNS (L & XL) Another Mark Marek cartoon of the Johns in bright industrial colors. **7** THE BIG CUP (L & XL) Weirdly distorted red lettering beneath a Giants-sized cup of steaming hot black java.

\$16 except shirt #3/\$18



Buttons 3 button set with Apollo 18 album art. \$2/set
Bumper Sticker Black & red design screen printed on weather-resistant paper. \$2 or 3 for \$5



DIAL A SONG
718.387.6962
It's free when you call from work.



The first six videos: Put Your Hand Inside The Puppethead, Don't Let's Start, (She Was A) Hotel Detective, Ana Ng, They'll Need A Crane and Purple Toupee. Sorry, only available in the United States.

Video Compilation \$15

Albums

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS (LP, CS, CD) The debut album. 19 songs including, "Don't Let's Start", "Hotel Detective", "Puppet Head" & "She's An Angel". **LINCOLN** (LP, CS, CD) The 2nd album. 18 songs including, "Ana Ng", "They'll Need A Crane", "Purple Toupee" & "Shoehorn With Teeth". **FLOOD** (LP, CS, CD) The 3rd album. 19 songs including, "Birdhouse In Your Soul", "Istanbul (Not Constantinople)" & "Your Racist Friend". **MISCELLANEOUS T** (CS & CD) The B Side/Remix Compilation Album. 18 songs including "Hey Mr. DJ, I Thought You Said We Had A Deal", "Birds Fly" & "Hello Radio". **APOLLO 18** (CS & CD) The 4th Album. 18 songs including, "I Palindrome I", "The Statue Got Me High" & "The Guitar". **LP \$7.50, CS \$8.50, CD \$14.00**

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

Baseball Hats

Black wool baseball hat embroidered with silver thread available in two designs. One size fits all.



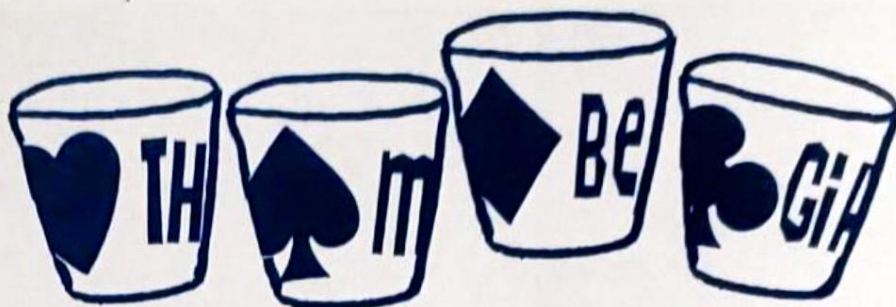
Building Better Music
\$20



TMBG



Two shots of John and John. Each set comes with an extra pair, so you can save one set and send the other. \$2



Four beautiful frosted shot glasses with red and black printing featuring the They Might Be Giants logo and card suit symbols. Perfect for poker games or just drinking alone! Just \$10/set



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Expiration date

THE FINE PRINT: Allow 4-8 weeks for delivery within the U.S. & Canada. Allow 8-12 weeks for delivery outside the U.S. & Canada. Most domestic orders are shipped via UPS (U.S. Mail available by request). All foreign orders shipped by U.S. Mail. All prices are in U.S. Dollars and payment can only be accepted in U.S. funds. Prices and descriptions are those in effect as of June 15, 1992 and are subject to change without notice.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE: If not fully satisfied, return merchandise to TMB Productions within 30 days of receipt for a full refund. Please enclose the packing slip for faster processing.

* For NY figure 8.25% sales tax on cost of goods + shipping & handling. † For NJ figure 6% sales tax on non-apparel items only.

Daytime Telephone # _____



- **LIVE FROM THE MOUNTAIN STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA...** TMBG's performance of "Particle Man" on American Public Radio's Charleston, WV-based live concert program *Mountain Stage* last August is included on *THE BEST OF MOUNTAIN STAGE* Volume 5, scheduled to be released by Blue Plate Music this spring. Amazingly, this is the first time a live TMBG song has ever been commercially released. The album also features a track from Giants' bassist Tony Maimone's other band, *Pere Ubu*, as well as a bunch of other cool music, so check it out...
- **IF YOU LIVE IN THE NORTHEASTERN U.S.** you'll want to keep a sharp eye out this spring. TMBG and the band will be playing a small number of live shows at colleges and other locations there during the last two weeks of April.
- **THINGS THAT MAKE US FEEL OLD.** In January John and John and 20 or 30 of their friends and associates celebrated the 10th anniversary of They Might Be Giants at a potluck dinner hosted by one of their Williamsburgh neighbors. It's really hard to believe that TMBG have been making music for a decade!
- **THEY MIGHT BE CYBERPUNKS?** Folks with access to an Internet electronic mail account will no doubt want to know that there is a TMBG Internet mailing list, which can be subscribed to by sending e-mail with the subject line 'subscribe digest' addressed to 'they-might-be-request@gnu.ai.mit.edu'. If you've also got Usenet NetNews access, be sure to check out the newsgroup 'alt.music.tmbg'. If you don't have Internet access, but do have a computer and a modem you might want to check out the TMBG message topics to be found on the online services Prodigy, GEnie and America Online. (If none of this makes any sense to you consult the nearest computer expert).
- **ADMINISTRATRIA DEPARTMENT.** The astute amongst you will have already noticed that the TMBG Post Office Box number has changed from 110553 to 110535. Please address all future correspondence accordingly. (Why ask why? Just do it!) As usual, please keep us up to date on your address changes and keep those cards and letters coming...

August 1992

Night Sides & Sounds

(Chicago - 11)

page 11

They Might Be Giants: The Weird and the Wired

Interview by Arthur Durkee

Cheerful tunes laced with sinister surrealism. Cheerful ditties about life, death, hatred, shyness, love, and guitars. That's only some of the musical terrain They Might Be Giants have claimed for their own. Their most recent album is *Apollonia 18*, featuring 18 songs—except that "Fingertips" is a monster collage of tidbits divided into 20 individual tracks ranging from 10 seconds to 2 minutes long. Most CD players have a RANDOM/SHUFFLE setting, and when you do that with this album, you get an unpredictable sound collage—the accidental juxtapositions are fascinating.

They Might Be Giants is the duo of John Linnell (accordion, bari sax, clarinet) and John Flansburgh (guitar). In concert at the Barrymore in Madison last month, they were augmented on stage by bass, drums, and reeds/keyboards, creating a tightly-rehearsed, full-size rock band sound. Yet musical and lyrical weirdness abounds, both live and on record. My favorite tracks on *Apollonia 18* are the strongest and funniest: "Spider," "She's Actual Size," "The Gutter" (which is a bent arrangement of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight"), and "Turn Around." But even the funniest tunes here have a dark underside—an awareness of the unpredictability of life. *Apollonia 18* extends the Giants' ascending orbit with brilliant, rocket-fueled modules of madness and music.

So where does this musical mayhem come from? I talked to John Linnell in a phone interview before the Madison show. He was very personable and articulate, friendly and full of the trademark They Might Be Giants ironies.

NS&S: Considering the nature of your music, I thought I'd throw out my personal questions...

John Linnell: I always understand the basis for prepared questions, because there are questions I like to ask people about their music. But on the other hand, as you probably already know, most musicians are made uncomfortable by questions like "What are your influences?"

I understand. So, what are your influences?
[laughter] Well, I've been heavily influenced by doing phone interviews... No. John and I are in our early thirties now. I sort of feel like we actually do have pretty much the same influences everyone else has who are our age. We were at a particularly impressionable age during the Beatles' career—this was the brand new music that every eight-year-old could like who had an older brother who bought records. It definitely wasn't too freaky for you to get into at that age, and it was something that you'd still like when you were older. So that was a really important influence, for that fortuitous reason, that we were that age at that time. But obviously there were other elements that grew in importance in the '70s, notably the emergence of things that were connected to underground rock or suggested something other than the mainstream, a kind of music you could identify with.

Like the experimental art rock stuff?

Not necessarily the art rock stuff. Basically there's this thing that happens for every person when they start getting a little older, when they realize that they don't have to like everything that's mainstream. They don't necessarily like everything that everyone else likes. They don't have to identify themselves as being like everyone else in order to feel good about themselves. So everybody starts to feel like there's something more individual that they're into. So for us, it was music that was not mainstream.

How did you get into the accordion?

I bought my first accordion in 1984, and I borrowed somebody's the year before and played it a little bit. But I got serious about it in '84; it became my instrument.

So you think of that as your main instrument.

Well, it is. In our performance, that's the instrument I use to play. When I write songs, that's the instrument I generally write on.

Do you still play sax, too?

Yeah, sure. On this tour now I've got a bari sax, and I'm

playing clarinet as well. In previous years I've played bass sax, which is a real drag to try and carry around. Not only is it gigantic, but the case for it is even bigger. I think the crew is really happy that I switched to baritone.

It seems like a natural question to ask how you do your music on tour?

For the last nine years we've been doing it using tapes. Recently we had an eight-track reel-to-reel doing all this stuff. We'd recorded everything ourselves; it was a hand composed of us. That was the show up until this summer. Now for the first time we're taking out a live rhythm section and a keyboardist/saxophonist. So we're now a five-piece. But we've never done this before, so this is kind of a major thing. This is partly why we're having such an elaborate production rehearsal, to make sure all the bugs are working. Keep those bugs in line!

Do you have precise ideas for arrangements in mind when you compose?

Oh yeah. The arrangements are all the reason why we do this, because we like to arrange music. The arrangement and the song are very bound up to one another in almost all cases with us. The drum sounds and instrument sounds are very important—it's really part of the song. It sort of comes out of doing stuff where you're just at home with a tape recorder for years and years. That was really how we started out.

The Living Room Studio Effect.

Yeah, exactly. We didn't start out playing in little groups and doing shows—that yields a very different result in a musician, when that's their background. It's obviously a good thing, and something we miss from not having done a lot of jamming with people and doing that kind of work.

How does your sense of arrangements affect a piece like "Fingertips" on the new album? It seems like that's very much a collage piece.

"Fingertips" was one of those really worked-out things, in some ways like a logical extension of what we've been doing all along. It's hyper-arranged, practically that's what it is, an arrangement. All the little bits are extremely short and melodic. So it's a lot like everything else we've done, only even more so. Taken to the ultimate in some way.

Yeah. That's like the extreme, the apogee of one our orbits. Using this live band is exactly the opposite for us. It's interesting now for us, now that we've done both things.

Are you going to be doing "Fingertips" live?

I don't think so, no. It's really hard work adapting these arrangements to a live band, just with the songs alone. It's been such a chore to get everything memorized, get everyone to figure out all the parts and memorize them. The fact that we haven't even started working on "Fingertips" now would suggest to me that we'll never learn it. There's other stuff that we're kind of halfway there with, maybe we'll get together by the end of this tour.

You're arrangements are so tight and precise, it would seem to be somewhat tricky to teach them to other people.

And cruel. Unnecessarily so. [laughter]

Do you take out the whist when you're rehearsing?

Well, you know, we're playing with people who we personally like a lot, get along with, and it's definitely fun to be around them. So you have to temper your fascist impulses. The impulses that John and I have evolved from just having machines that do whatever you want for years and years. Or mostly whatever you want, whatever you can get them to do.

Are you still doing Dial-A-Song, then?

Absolutely. Dial-A-Song will never die. In fact, I'm sure long after we've broken up, stopped making records, done all that stuff, that we could still do Dial-A-Song. It's so easy. It's just a phone machine. Doesn't require any work. I guess the work is doing the demo for the songs that we'd be making anyway. They don't have to sound okay, they just have to be audible—'cause they don't sound okay once they go over the phone line anyway.



They Might Be Giants break out into "Roll out the Barrel!"

Where did Dial-A-Song come from?

The obvious answer is that there was all these Dial-A-Prayer things when we were growing up. In just seemed like kind of an easy thing. They'd come out with phone machines in the early '80s; it was something you could buy and use. It was Flansburgh's idea; he wanted to just do it on his own phone. To me it seemed like a horrible idea, 'cause I knew first of all that I'd never be able to reach him again. Three minute message on his machine, so you have to listen to that whole thing in order to call him. It was true for about a year; the only way to reach John was to call Dial-A-Song and start yelling after the beep for him to pick up the phone. Hopefully he was there.

When did you actually start that?

In '83, I believe. It was right around the time that we'd started performing out. I wasn't playing the accordion yet, but we had a series of mishaps. One was John had his apartment broken into, and he lost a really nice guitar, and the tape recorder we'd been using for the live show, the reel-to-reel, and an amplifier. That put a damper on our performing lives. And then the other thing was, the same week, I fell off my bicycle and broke my wrist, so my whole right hand was in a cast. That really meant we had a lot more free time then we had had previously. So it was time to implement Dial-A-Song.

What's your total output of songs now? Are you up to 800 or so?

800? Well, we've got four albums out, we've got another thing of album-length that's just B-sides, plus we've got new B-sides from the last two albums.

From the singles releases?

Yeah, exactly. So I think the total is a hundred songs released. I'd venture to guess there's maybe another hundred songs that we never want anyone to hear, somewhere in the vault. The main thing is that the ones you get are the ones that are any good, and the ones you don't hear, you don't have to worry about, because they're terrible. They probably were on Dial-A-Song, but we took them off.

You guys have been called coffee-driven Dadaists, and I wondered what your caffeine intake was like.

Very high. I've got a little empty styrofoam cup in front of me right now. See, I don't actually drink a lot, but it has a really extreme effect on me. It governs my life.

Hey Everybody-

There's a lot of activity here around They Might Be Giants' tree-fort. While John and I recover from the near-year long Apollo 18 touring, plans are already afoot for future projects.

FRANK BLACK VIDEOS

In the beginning of March, I will have completed directing the "Los Angeles" video for Frank Black- also known as Black Francis from the Pixies. (He's got a new album coming out on Elektra this spring. Linnell and TMBG touring-band-mate Kurt Hoffman play horns on the album.)

Having only directed "The Guitar" video before, I am a bit nervous about applying my limited skills to somebody else's project, but Frank and I had a good time cooking up the ideas (Frank on hover craft, fake metal band lip-syncing the song) so it seems like it's going to come out good. We're shooting them in Los Angeles and on location at Salton Sea, California, which is a combination of salt flats and flooded town. Be sure to call all those MTV 900 numbers and request the video- "Los Angeles" by Frank Black. There is also a possibility that John and I will be hosting that 120 Minutes show soon, so stay tuned.

Recordings available only from

Hello

COMING
SOON

>THE RESIDENTS

>FRANK BLACK

(Black Francis

of the Pixies)

>EUGENE

CHADBOURNE

(and from Japan)

>THE NELORIES

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NEW DIAL-A-SONG SET UP

As some of you have probably already noticed, Dial-A-Song has changed from a humble phone machine to a super-fancy high-tech computer-based voice mail deal. Besides the immediate chore of setting the thing up (leaving Smokin' Bo Orloff, Linnell and me scratching our heads over the new cyber-opportunities for a day or so) it's running smoothly, and now offers the Dial-A-Song caller many different songs over

the course of a day. Every few days I've been setting up the machine to play a different song every hour. We are also considering making it "interactive" with a changing menu of song choices. If you haven't called recently, you should check it out. It's clearer and has a lot of new songs written since we got off the tour, as well as the old "too ugly to get on the album" chestnuts. 25 Hours a day, 6 days a week Dial-A-Song beckons- Just a regular charge phone call to Brooklyn at 718-387-6962.

HELLO OFFERINGS

Work is nearly complete on the Hello Studio facility here in beautiful Brooklyn, and a number of productions are in the works for the Hello Recording Club. I'll be producing a lot of these sessions, and although there is no way of knowing everything that is going to be coming up on Hello, I hope these projects will become a valued part of your music collection.

Later-

John Flansburgh

HEY Editor, HELLO Co-curator
Guitarist, They Might Be Giants